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Abraham Lincoln



— that this nation, under God shall
have a new birth of freedom, and that
Government of the people, by the people and for
the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Courtesy of Kansas City Star

By James M. Coburn

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LINCOLN

It will be *one* of my purposes in this paper to show, by a sketch of Lincoln's ancestry, early life and subsequent career, how truly he stands alone, of all men who have been the product of this new Western Civilization.

Even those of us who were living at the time of his active public life, and who have since read and studied what others have written and said of him, pause with almost breathless wonder each time we are led through those avenues of a study of his life, to some new view of his many-sided greatness. The farther we get, on the plane of national existence, away from the rugged and mountainous turmoil of the period of 1860 to 1865, the smaller and more indistinct appear all the lesser notable figures, and the higher and more sublime in its solitary grandeur towers up the character of Abraham Lincoln. We may well ask, therefore, from whence came this man, who more than any other man of the past century, more than perhaps any man of many other centuries, embodies all that is best in the hopes and aspirations of mankind in their struggle for something better.

ANCESTRY

From the first knowledge to be had of his ancestry, we learn that the earliest known ancestor of Abraham Lincoln was Samuel Lincoln, who emigrated from the west of England and settled at Hingham, Mass., a few years after the landing of the Pilgrims. Stated by occupations in his ancestry, we find that it includes a weaver, two blacksmiths, a farmer and a carpenter.

The grandfather, who was Abraham I, was killed by the Indians in Kentucky in 1784; his son, Thomas, father of Abraham, who was with his father at the time, was rescued from death by the well directed rifle shot of an elder brother. Lincoln's father is described as easy-going, slow to anger, but formidable when aroused, as he was physically a powerful man. As to worldly possessions, being of an uneasy and roving disposition, he exemplified the usual fate of a rolling stone. Not less than eight moves of his are recorded from the birth of his son Abraham, until the boy reached the age of twenty-one. After Abraham was earning money of his own, he bought his father a farm of forty acres, where he lived until he died, frequently helped by gifts of money and provisions by his then rising son.

On June 10, 1806, Thomas Lincoln was married to his cousin, Nancy Hanks, a niece of his employer for whom he worked as a carpenter, and of whom he learned his trade.

Nancy Hanks' father being dead, she was living with an aunt, Mrs. Berry, who was a person of superior character, and with attainments above her surroundings.

For a time after their marriage they lived at a hamlet called Elizabethtown, where the husband worked at his trade, but two years later moved to a farm near Hodgenville in Hardin County, Kentucky, where on the 12th day of February, 1809, Abraham was born. Four years later the family moved to a more comfortable house at Knob Creek, not far away, where they lived three years. These years were, from all accounts, undoubtedly years of privation and hardship. Then the roving spirit seized Thomas Lincoln again, and loading all the family possessions on a flat boat, they floated down the Ohio and settled at what is now Gentryville, in Spencer County, Indiana, where they built a cabin fourteen feet square, with one side out; they lived more than a year in this rude shelter, the boy Abraham, sleeping in the loft on a bed of leaves over one end of the cabin. This cabin was improved in the second year, and in it the family lived for eleven years; but in the meantime, in the year 1818, when Lincoln was ten years of age, the mother died, her death probably being directly or indirectly the result of the hardships and privations of the frontier life.

Until the last few years it was singular how little we could learn of the mother of America's greatest son. It would be supposed that after the son became famous, details of his mother's character and life would have been sought and found from Lincoln himself; but it has been noted as a fact that Lincoln was always silent when this topic, or any other connected with his boyhood, was touched upon; his silence, it is believed, was a result of a shrinking on his part from recalling the poverty and hardships of those days.

For many years there were cruel and persistent reports concerning Lincoln's parentage, the origin of which no doubt, dated back to some political campaign, in which Lincoln was a candidate, previous to his nomination—a fair specimen of partisan mud-slinging, which time does not seem to have entirely eradicated.

About fifteen years ago, one of the Hanks family, a lady living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Mrs. Caroline Hanks Hitchcock, in preparing a book of genealogy of the Hanks family, became so much interested in the mother of Abraham Lincoln, that she determined, if possible, to get at the real facts concerning Nancy Hanks' childhood and later life, and especially as to the cloud cast over her and her illustrious son, as to the legitimacy of the child.

The thanks of every lover of the memory of Abraham Lincoln are due to Mrs. Hitchcock for her careful and diligent search, which resulted in her unearthing full documentary evidence, showing the marriage of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks on June 12th, 1806, in Washington County, Kentucky.

Mrs. Hitchcock, in her little book, which can be seen in our public library, also develops the fact that the Hanks' family in America was begun by a settler from England in 1699, at or near Plymouth, Massachusetts, and further, that they were a remarkable family. They are spoken of by a writer of the 18th century as "a remarkably inventive family" and as "a family of founders."

It has been shown that they cast the first bells that were made in America, and also the first cannon.

They also started the first silk mills in this country, and that one member of the family was distinguished as a scientific investigator. From these interesting facts it may be safely assumed by those who believe in heredity, that from his mother, Lincoln inherited the broad vision and mental grasp, that made possible his achievements as the foremost statesman of his age.

For more than a year his sister, Sarah, then little more than eleven years old, cared for the household. Of the poverty of the family at this time there is abundant evidence; and there is a pathos in the sight of this eleven year old girl attempting to take the place of the mother, in the care of the little cabin, with her father and younger brother as her only companions. Standing with uncovered heads in the presence of this scene, representative of many such, both then and now, even in our very midst, we may well say with England's great poet:

"Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joy, and their destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor."

In 1819 Thomas Lincoln married Mrs. Sallie Bush Johnson, a widow with three children, a woman undoubtedly of much energy and nobility of character. While she brought with her nothing that would be considered riches, she did bring household furniture which added greatly to the comfort of the family. Better than this, she brought habits of order and thrift which were of more value still. Contrary to the expectation of friends and predictions of the public, almost invariably the accompaniments of a second marriage under such circumstances, the marriage not only proved to be a happy one for the pair themselves, but it provided a pleasant home for all the children, the step-mother always treating Abraham as if he were her own child. She appears to have understood the boy Abraham better than any one else—to have recognized his talents and encouraged him in his studies. It is interesting to mention at this point, that she lived until after the war, and that her last resting place is now marked by a handsome monument erected in her memory by the still living son of Abraham Lincoln.

This period of comparative comfort in the life of the growing lad, takes us up to the time he was sixteen years of age, during which time he attended school for a few weeks in each year, and, if we may judge from the best information to be had, these schools were far from being what would be considered at the present time, good schools.

It is of interest to note at this point the books that he read. The following is a list of them: The Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, Aesop's Fables, Robinson Crusoe, a History of the United States and the General Statutes of the State of Indiana. Excepting the last, these books call for no comment. That a boy of his age could have waded through the Statutes of Indiana shows that either reading matter must have been very scarce with him, or else that at this time the natural bent of his mind was showing its tendency towards the law. In support of this last theory it is asserted by some of his biographers as a positive fact, that his determination to study law began at this point.

The boy Abraham, from a physical standpoint, was unusually large and mature from the age of ten years and upward. By the time he had reached his sixteenth year he was practically a man grown. As a gymnast, and in the exhibition of all feats of strength, he had no equal in all the surrounding country. At this early age even, he had acquired the reputation of being the best story teller for miles around, thus fully shadowing forth the high reputation he held in this line until the date of his death.

His great passion for fairness and justice had also established itself at this age, and as a consequence he was in much demand among his fellows as a go-between and referee in all matters where unbiased judgment was required.

At the age of nineteen he had his first sight of the outside world, having been employed by a storekeeper to go with his son with a flat boat load of provisions to New Orleans. We have very little, if any record that this trip had any special bearing on his future life.

On March 1, 1830, Abraham, then being twenty-one years old, the whole family moved by wagon to Macon, Illinois, on the north side of the Sangamon river. After helping his parents to get fairly settled in his new home, he started out for himself. He had reached by this time an unusual height, six feet four inches; he was entirely devoid of superfluous flesh, and his biographers state that he could out run and out-wrestle any man in his parts.

About a year after this, being in the employ of a storekeeper at the village where he lived, he entered the employ of one David Offutt, and contracted with him to take a flat boat load of merchandise to New Orleans, his pay being \$12 per month. It was on this occasion that Lincoln first came in contact with the worst side of slavery, by visiting the slave market in New Orleans. Leaving the auction block where a mulatto girl, so white that only a practiced eye could detect in her any negro blood, had been sold amid brutal remarks from the bidders, he turned to a companion and said, "If I live, and if I ever have a chance, I will hit that thing, and hit it hard."

A year later Mr. Lincoln engaged in a mercantile venture with a partner at New Salem, Illinois, which resulted disastrously, the partner running away and leaving Lincoln to manage the wreck as best he could. This transaction left Lincoln \$1200 in

debt. With his scrupulous sense of honor, he gave his own personal notes to every one of the creditors of the defunct firm, and it is proper to state at this time that he was seventeen years in paying off this debt. On one occasion, a few years later, one of his creditors becoming impatient, levied upon his horse and surveying outfit, and but for the intervention of a friend who bought the horse and outfit in at sheriff's sale and turned it back to Lincoln, he would have been without means of earning his livelihood. His action in this case and a few instances like that of his walking seven miles one night after business hours to deliver a few ounces of tea to a customer to correct a mistake in weights, gave him the name "Honest Abe" which followed him all through the remainder of his life.

About this time he was appointed postmaster at New Salem, and at the same time was appointed deputy under the county surveyor, and for several years supported himself and paid off a portion of his debts through these two offices, although it may be said that the emoluments from his office as postmaster were so unconsiderable as to be almost ludicrous.

In 1837, being then 27 years of age, and having for a few months studied law, he removed to Springfield, Illinois, and entered into partnership with one Stewart.

The length of time allotted me will not permit of going very much into the details of his life at this time. Suffice it to say that he went through the trials, poverty and hardship of a poor attorney in a sparsely settled country, following the court as it moved about on its circuit.

It will be proper, however, at this time to touch upon Lincoln's love affairs, which terminated in 1842 by his marriage to Miss Todd. With so much natural diffidence, and with a personal appearance against him both as a boy and a young man, he went little into the society of his several abiding places; notwithstanding this, however, at the age of 25 he passed through an affair of the heart which undoubtedly left a shadow over his whole future life. An acquaintance with a charming lady, then living at New Salem continued under circumstances where sympathy for her under trying circumstances was only natural, eventually ripened into mutual love, followed by a formal engagement. The death of the young lady not long after plunged Lincoln into such profound grief that for a time there was no balm of consolation, and his friends feared he might take his own life. At this point in his life it is believed that the profound melancholy, which appears to have been inherited from his mother, was first developed. Be this as it may, there is strong reason to believe that in the grave of sweet Anna Rutledge was buried his only passionate love. Not long afterwards he made the acquaintance of Miss Todd, of Kentucky, who afterwards became his wife. The course of true love again did not run smoothly; after becoming engaged, natural differences in taste asserted themselves to such a degree that, at Lincoln's request, he was released from the engagement. His

high sense of honor never left him easy for a moment afterwards, and in letters to his friends he unsparingly condemned himself for his inconstancy. Finally, acting no doubt under the stress of a sense of duty, rather than any stronger emotion, he became reconciled to his love, and on the 4th of November, 1842, he and Miss Todd were married at the house of Miss Todd's brother-in-law at Springfield, Illinois.

A careful reading of the testimony of all Lincoln's most intimate friends would preclude any possibility of asserting with truth that the marriage was a happy one. Perhaps, it was all that could be expected of the parties to the solemn contract, where one married from a sense of duty and the other to gratify a desire to shine in official society.

It will also be well to notice the habits of his life at this time.

In the matter of the use of intoxicants, Lincoln was a total abstainer; his most intimate friends testify they never knew him to use liquor at all. When the committee of the Chicago Convention came to his house to notify him of his nomination, after doing their work some of his friends suggested bringing in wine for the refreshment of the committee. Lincoln positively objected, saying that he did not wish the custom of his hospitality changed from its simplicity now that he was a candidate for president, and that he would not be a party to putting the cup to his neighbors' lips. He not only practiced temperance, but preached it actively in his earlier career, and as a member of the Sons of Temperance, often spoke on public occasions in behalf of total abstinence. Col. Hay, one of his secretaries and biographers, says, "Mr. Lincoln was a man of extremely temperate habits. He made no use of either whiskey or tobacco during all the years I knew him."

John Nicolay, his private secretary, says, "During all the five years of my service as his private secretary I never saw him drink a glass of whiskey, and I never knew or heard of his taking one."

Gambling, or anything that approached it, he held in detestation.

There are some evidences that as a young man he fell into the common habit of the use of profane language, but if this be so, it was a habit that did not follow him into the period of his public life.

The period of Lincoln's life from the time he moved to Springfield until he was called therefrom to become the chief magistrate of the nation, is one upon which we have a large mass of evidence. He early took part in the controversy over the question of slavery then raging, not ranging himself at the time with the abolitionists on the one hand, nor with those who were for extending slavery, on the other.

The first public office which he held was as a representative to the legislature of Illinois. There is nothing in the record of his actions as such representative to give any indication of the

power he was afterwards to become, but on the other hand, there is abundant evidence to show that he conducted himself with that regard for his own personal honor, and for the general good, that characterized the remaining years of his life.

A few years later he was in the halls of Congress, a representative from the Springfield district. There are a few extracts from some of his speeches made at that time, which give some evidence of the mental breadth he was acquiring, and of his attitude upon the then engrossing slavery question. Aspiring to a seat in the senate of the United States, he was a few years afterwards defeated by Judge Douglass, after a very exciting political campaign, during which the famous joint debates were held with Douglass upon the question of the extension of slavery.

This brings his life up to the period when, on the 10th of June, 1860, at Chicago, he was nominated by the Republican party as its candidate for the presidency. Opposed in this candidacy were Judge Douglass, who represented the moderate Democrats, particularly of the North. John C. Breckenridge, who represented the extreme southern Democrats and Edward Bell for the moderate Democrats in the southern states.

After a campaign, the strain and excitement of which no one at this date can fully understand, Lincoln was, on the 5th day of November, chosen President of the United States.

We may not know the depth or variety of his feelings as he found himself lifted by the suffrages of his countrymen to this high office. Knowing as no one else in the country probably did, the strenuousness of the demands which the troublous times would make upon him, we catch a thrill of these feelings in his farewell to his Springfield neighbors, a speech abounding in expressions of good-will toward his neighbors and charity for those of all sections of the country who might differ from him; tinged all through with a strain of sadness through which can now be read a presentiment that he was never to return to them alive.

Of his midnight journey to Washington, the doubts as to his being seated through machinations against him of the apostles of secession, the confusion and distress in which he found everything at Washington, are too long and complicated to be treated of in detail; suffice it to say that amid all this darkness, distress and confusion, Lincoln held steadily on his way in the full belief that when the situation should be further developed, the good sense and patriotism of the whole people of the North would be behind him.

THE INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES IN HIS ADMINISTRATION

I have not time to more than touch upon the difficulties which surrounded Lincoln upon his being introduced into the office of President of the United States on the 4th of March, 1861. He found a government largely in the hands of those who were plotting its overthrow; an empty treasury; a small and

scattered army and a dearth of arms and ammunition with which to arm those who might wish to come forward to the defense of the nation.

His great desire to unite all the various elements of the north, embracing nearly every shade of opinion on the then important slavery question, is shown by the fact that in the selection of his cabinet, he gave four of the most important posts to those who were his rivals in the contest for the high office which he had secured at the hands of the people of his country.

Let any one who supposes, not knowing the facts, that common patriotism in the face of the death struggle for the preservation of the Union, made Lincoln's cabinet a united and harmonious one, read of the difficulties and jealousies which at once, and all through the war, taxed to the utmost the man whose wisdom would entitle him to be ranked with that of Solomon, and his patience with that of Moses.

Seward was a great and patriotic man, and a great Secretary of State, yet within six weeks after Lincoln's inauguration, in a letter to the President, he proposed in substance that Lincoln should abdicate most of the duties and prerogatives of his high office and turn them over to a no less person than Seward himself. The letter from President Lincoln in reply is an historical document, and settled once and for all the question of who was to be President.

Stanton, a man of iron will, patriotic to the highest degree, honest and capable, but irascible, impolitic, impatient, and often domineering. As illustrating one phase of the relation between President Lincoln and the great War Secretary, the well known incident of Lincoln's reply to some representative who wished an appointment made by Stanton, but which Stanton refused, is to the point. After hearing the complaint that Stanton refused to make the appointment, Lincoln said sadly, "I do not seem to have much influence with this administration."

HIS ELOQUENCE

As a public speaker, Lincoln lacked some of those qualities which are deemed necessary to a great orator; his voice, though penetrating and far-carrying, was high and shrill; his tall, ungainly and somewhat ungraceful figure was against him; but from the day of his famous Cooper Union speech in New York, his reputation as a forceful speaker was established throughout the entire North.

Those who read carefully what is preserved of his speeches from the time of his great debate with Judge Douglass on, cannot fail in any of them to note their many telling bits of political wisdom, expressed in terse, and sometimes almost homely Saxon language; but it was not until the stress of the war had inspired his tongue and pen that the best of his public speaking was made. It is a singular circumstance, however, that high as the regard is in which his Gettysburg speech is now held, at the time of its delivery, it fell absolutely flat upon the compara-

tively small audience there assembled. So far as we can learn, and a magazine article upon this subject was written not long ago by one of the persons present on the occasion, Edward Everett, who was the orator of the occasion, seemed to have been the only one present who realized that anything remarkable had been uttered.

As we cannot too often read this gem of English composition, I will repeat it in your hearing:

“Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We are met to dedicate a portion of it as the final resting place of those who have gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a large sense we cannot dedicate,—we cannot consecrate,—we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we may take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that Government of the people, by the people and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Passing from this occasion, we come to the second inaugural address, a passage from which I will read, the notes of which fall upon our ears, coming as they did a few months only before his death, with something of the suggestion of a tolling bell.

“Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this scourge of war may speedily pass away; yet if it be God’s will that it continue until the wealth piled by bondsmen by two hundred and fifty years’ unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sworn, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphans; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

HIS RELIGION

When we come to the subject of Lincoln's religious feelings and belief, we come to one of those subjects upon which testimony seems so strangely at variance. In going over the mass of evidence on this point, which can be gleaned from every life of Lincoln that has been written, I am constrained to the belief that the testimony is often colored by the particular religious belief or bias of the witness, consequently to a great extent, I shall adhere to the plan of laying before you Mr. Lincoln's own words, and of leaving to you the decision of what his religious belief really was.

In early life his religious privileges in this direction were limited to occasional services held by itinerant preachers, and almost the first notice we have of anything of the kind is the fact that the boy Abraham, then ten years old, made a horse-back journey of sixty miles to bring a Campbellite preacher to preach a funeral service in memory of his mother, who had then been dead several months, there being no preacher at hand to perform this service at the time of her death.

It should also be borne in mind that this peculiarly reticent man where his own feelings were concerned, was especially reticent in matters of his own religious belief.

It is a matter beyond controversy that as a young man, after having read Paine's "Age of Reason," he wrote an essay, or series of essays against the authenticity and authority of the Bible, and, indeed, against the Christian religion in general; which writings were consigned to the flames by a very wise friend of his. At this time he was living with his father, Thomas Lincoln, in Illinois, where the father soon united with what is called the "Campbellite" church, and died in that faith.

A careful biographer says: "I think we may say that Abraham Lincoln's belief was clear and fixed, so far as it went, but that he rejected important dogmas which are or have been considered essential to salvation by some of the evangelistic denominations."

He was an habitual reader of the Bible, and was more familiar with its contents than most clergymen. His study of the Bible and familiarity with its pages are shown in his literary style and frequent quotations. In 1864 he wrote his old friend, Joshua Speed, "I am profitably engaged reading the Bible. Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance upon faith, and you will live and die a better man."

I quote again from a letter to a friend, "Whenever any church will inscribe over its altar as a qualification for membership the Saviour's statement of the substance of the Law and Gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' that church will I join with all my heart and soul."

Judge Gillespie, an intimate friend of Lincoln, recounts the following, in an interview with Lincoln that took place in January preceeding his inauguration;

Lincoln said, "Separation is only possible upon the consent of this Government, to the erection of a foreign slave government out of the present slave states."

"I see the duty devolving upon me. I have read upon my knees the story of Gethsemane, where the Son of God prayed that the cup of bitterness might pass from him.

"I am in the Garden of Gethsemane, and my cup of bitterness is full and overflowing."

In the closing words of his parting speech to his neighbors and friends at Springfield before he started on the long journey, never to return to them, he said:

"I now leave, not knowing when or whether, even, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope you in your prayers will commend me, I bid you all an affectionate farewell."

In one of his speeches he said, "I know that the Lord is always on the side of the right; but it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side."

On one occasion a clergyman from a little village in Central New York came to Washington for the purpose of recovering the body of a gallant young captain who had been killed at the second battle of Bull Run. Having been presented to Mr. Lincoln, the latter inquired in a pleasant tone what he could do for his visitor; the clergyman replied, "I have not come to ask any favors of you, Mr. President, I have only come to say that the loyal people of the North are sustaining you and will continue to do so. We are giving you all that we have,—the lives of our sons as well as our confidence and our prayers. You must know that no pious father or mother ever kneels in prayer these days without asking God to give you strength and wisdom." With tears in his eyes, Lincoln thanked his visitor and said, "But for those prayers I should have faltered and perhaps failed long ago. Tell every father and mother you know to keep on praying and I will keep on fighting, for I am sure that God is on our side."

As the clergyman started to leave the room, Lincoln held him by the hand and said, "I suppose I may consider this a sort of pastoral call." "Yes," replied the clergyman. "Out in our country," continued Lincoln, "when a parson made a pastoral call it was always the custom for the folks to ask him to lead in prayer, and I should like to ask you to pray with me today; pray that I may have strength and wisdom." The two men knelt side by side before a settee, and the clergyman offered the most fervent ap-

peal to the Almighty Power that ever fell from his lips. As they rose, Lincoln grasped his visitor's hand and remarked in a satisfied sort of way,—“I feel better.”

After the battle of Gettysburg, while visiting General Sickles who was badly wounded at that battle, the General asked Lincoln how he felt during the days of the battle and the few days which preceded it. Lincoln hesitated but finally replied, “I will tell you how it was. In the pinch of your campaign up there, when everybody seemed panic stricken and nobody could tell what was going to happen, I went into my room one day and locked the door, and got down on my knees before Almighty God and prayed to Him mightily for a victory at Gettysburg. I told God that if we were to win the battle He must do it, for I had done all I could. I told Him this was His war, and our cause was His cause, but that we couldn't stand another Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. And then and there I made a solemn vow to Almighty God that if He would stand by our boys at Gettysburg I would stand by Him. And He did, and I will. And after that—I don't know how it was, and I can't explain it, but soon—a sweet comfort crept into my soul that things would go all right at Gettysburg, and that is why I had no fears about you.”

John G. Nicolay, who probably knew Lincoln as thoroughly and was as familiar with his opinions as any one, said:

“I do not remember ever having discussed religion with Mr. Lincoln, nor do I know of any authorized statement of his views in existence. He sometimes talked freely, and never made any concealment of his belief or unbelief in any dogma or doctrine but never provoked religious controversies. I speak more from his disposition and habits than from any positive declaration on his part. He frequently made remarks about sermons he had heard, books he had read, or doctrines that had been advanced, and my opinion as to his religious belief is based upon such casual evidences. There is not the slightest doubt that he believed in a Supreme Being of omnipotent power and omniscient watchfulness over the children of men, and that this great Being could be reached by prayer. Mr. Lincoln was a praying man; I know that to be a fact. And I have heard him request people to pray for him, which he would not have done had he not believed that prayer is answered. Many a time have I heard Mr. Lincoln ask ministers and Christian women to pray for him, and he did not do this for effect. He was no hypocrite and had such reverence for sacred things that he would not trifle with them.”

“It would be difficult for any one to define Mr. Lincoln's position or to classify him among the sects. I should say that he believed in a good many articles in the creeds of the orthodox churches and rejected a good many that did not appeal to his reason. He praised the simplicity of the Gospels. He often declared that the Sermon on the Mount contained the essence of all law and justice, and that the Lord's Prayer was the sublimest composition in human language. He was a constant

reader of the Bible, but had no sympathy with theology, and often said that in matters affecting a man's relation with his Maker he couldn't give a power of attorney."

In one of his campaigns in which he was a candidate for some state office, in campaigning his own district he found that of twenty-three ministers all but three were against him. The main issue in the campaign in which he was engaged was the question of slavery. The attitude of these preachers seems to have cut Lincoln to the quick. "These men well know," he said, "that I am for freedom in the Territories, freedom everywhere as free as the Constitution and the laws will permit, and that my opponents are for slavery. They know this, and yet, with this book in their hands (the Bible) in the light of which human bondage cannot live a moment, they are going to vote against me; I do not understand it at all. I know there is a God, and that He hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming, and I know that His hand is in it. If He has a place and work for me, and I think He has, I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but Truth is everything; I know I am right, because I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God. I have told them that a house divided against itself cannot stand, and Christ and reason say the same, and they will find it so. I may not see the end; but it will come, and I shall be vindicated, and these men will find they have not read their Bible right."

I ask you to take this somewhat disjointed, and I confess badly put together evidence, add to it the references to God and the hereafter in his well known public documents and utterances, weigh the evidence from the standpoint of what is now considered necessary to constitute a Christian man, and draw your own conclusions as to this much discussed question.

There is no need that at this time the closing events of the war should be recounted. The mighty struggle of four years, during which Lincoln was the chieftain of one of the contending forces, was drawing to a close. Slavery was forever abolished. Richmond had fallen, and the shattered remains of Lee's army had been quietly paroled at Appomattox. The whole North was jubilant over the ending of a war, costly in blood and treasure, a joy which, in some of its essential features, was shared by our brethren of the South.

The general rejoicing at Washington and at the army, was reflected in President Lincoln. But the shadow which had appeared on his worn face from the first year of the war, and which was more apparent each year of its progress, was not fully lifted. The iron of blood-shed and strife had entered too deeply into the great soul of this peace-loving man. The strain of four years of his high office, with its enormous demands upon him, had undermined his vitality to such an extent that the natural melancholy of his temperament was constantly in the ascendency. A presentiment, a sort of strange prescience of an impending tragedy, which he had cherished and given expression to many times dur-

ing his presidency, seemed to darken the horizon, now brilliantly lighted with the flashing fires of returning peace.

On the 14th of April, while attending Ford's Theatre at Washington, the earthly life of Abraham Lincoln was ended by the bullet of an assassin, of whom it may be said that he acted without other sanction than that of his own fanatical and ill-balanced nature.

The great heart had ceased to beat. On his dull ears the praises and lamentations of those who loved him, and the detractions and complaints of those who hated or misunderstood him, were alike powerless. The voice, raised often in defense of the weak and oppressed, in words of kindness and charity toward his enemies, in exhortation to faithfulness to the Union, was stilled forever.

He had lead his people for four years up through the wilderness of fratricidal strife and bloodshed, had looked over across the Jordan into the promised land of peace, had seen in prophetic visions the flag he loved floating over a free and united people, but into that land of promise it had been decreed that he should never enter.

Three score years have now passed since the nation stood with uncovered heads and chastened spirits while his worn form was borne by tender hands to its last resting place in the soil of his adopted state where he grew from an obscure country lawyer to become the foremost statesman of his age.

As years pass by, a grateful nation more and more appreciative of his genius and services, justly studies with increasing earnestness the mystery of his power, and in every land and clime throughout the whole world there are to be found those who hold in reverent wonder, the name and memory of Abraham Lincoln.

FINALLY

How shall we account for this man? We say with those of old, Whence has this man this wisdom, and may even truthfully carry the inquiry further and say, "Is not this the son of the carpenter?" Let us look to the source from which the biographer usually finds the springs of the greatness of his hero.

Do we scan his ancestry for unusual hereditary talents and virtues—a glance forbids a second look. Was it contact with the seats of learning and the high priests of erudition, that developed and shaped this clean-cut and logical mind? We are answered by the few months of attendance at the frontier schools, whose teachers were semi-illiterate, and amid an atmosphere about him of the most elementary sort. Was his towering greatness due to the help and patronage of those who stood in the high places of the nation, or of the rich and powerful relations? Our

words come back to us refuted by the memory of his long struggle with poverty, which closed only a few years before his election to the presidency.

I shall now make answer to the question in an expression of my own opinion as to the source of Lincoln's greatness, in which I shall run the risk of being considered old-fashioned and out of date.

We are told that when God wished a leader to bring Israel out of the bondage of Egypt, he raised up Moses. Later, when the security and solidity of the twelve tribes was in danger, he raised up David. Coming down later, time would fail to tell of Paul, of St. Augustine, of Luther and of our own Washington. Finally in the course of time, for the preservation of a great nation and its government, and the consequent good to all mankind, through a government of the people and by the people, for the people, came the necessity for a man whose prophetic cry from the wilderness was, "A nation half slave and half free, cannot exist." That man, provided by the God who rules the world, was at hand when the call came, born and bred in such obscurity that the records of his humble origin are meager and not easily found; not in the lap of luxury, not in soft clothing or amid the classic halls of learning, but amid the common people—the kind of people whom the great Galilean chose as his friends and disciples. Up to within a short time before his nomination in Chicago, he was comparatively unknown to the great majority of the nation he was to save. He was at once true to the cry with which he came; amid variety of opinions and counsels, he alone was firm and steadfast in his belief in the people, and with inspired wisdom and sagacity, guided the counsels of the nation, until, with the ending of human slavery in the country, and the re-union of the hostile sections in full view, he was so suddenly called from his labors by the assassin's bullet.

Truly it may be said of the Great Emancipator, that he is not a type; he stands alone. He had no ancestors, no fellows, and no successors.



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